

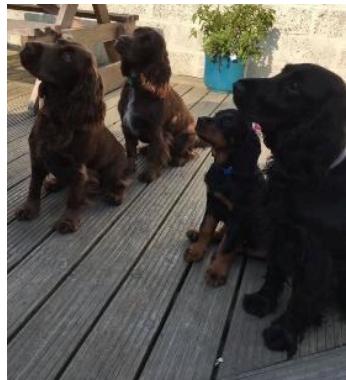
Homefield K9 Training

<https://homefieldk9training.co.uk/>

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Recall Tips



Reliable recall can be one of the hardest behaviours to train when your dog is faced with tempting distractions; prey scents, other dogs and just the joy of running, for example. The only way to compete with these temptations is to make coming back to you more rewarding than the distraction.

The following are a few tips that may help you in improving your dog's ability to come when called. It's absolutely vital to begin teaching at home and to make sure that your pup is coming back every time here before you try out on a walk.

- **Control and Management**

If you know that your dog's recall isn't great, use a long-line to ensure that they can't do a runner. If they know they don't have to come when called, they are more likely to repeat this – a long-line means that you can prevent them disappearing over the horizon, while giving them a good degree of freedom to run and explore. Waterproof brands are best as they can be cleaned and dried quickly and easily.

- **Choose and condition a cue**

If you've been shouting 'come' or 'here' and your dog has learned to ignore it, it might be time to use a new word. I quite like 'Ready!'; one of my clients uses 'What's this?' – choose something that will attract your dog's attention and then make it really worthwhile for them to be near you when they hear it. Start by saying the word about five times, in the tone you will use to call them, feeding a treat immediately after every repetition. Do this several times a day. Gradually increase the distance between you and the dog, over a period of several days, so that eventually you are calling them from one room to another, from garden to house etc, always feeding after the cue.

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N.B. – you can also condition a whistle in this way and this can be a really good change of cue as the sound carries further than the human voice and may be heard more easily.

- **Treats**

Make sure you have really **high value** treats for recall – something that makes it worth coming away from exciting distractions. Kibble and shop-bought treats may be fine for basic 'sit' and similar training, but these just aren't going to cut it in the face of temptations on a walk. Think human food: chopped chicken, ham, sausage, cheese, baked liver, left-over roast meat. Keep these mega-treats for the difficult training such as recall and loose lead walking, and vary them from day to day so that they stay exciting.

- **Treat placement**

Treats delivered by hand can be very rewarding – but you can make them even more exciting by throwing them! The treat then becomes prey, to be chased and pounced on or found in the grass, so he is coming back for a game as well as a treat, getting that predatory drive focused close to you rather than the other side of the field.

You're also building value in the area around you, so that it's the place where good things happen rather than the place where the fun ends.

And on that note, recall your dog and reward several times during a walk, putting them back on the lead at times, so that letting them off again becomes another reinforcement – if you only ever clip it back on when it's time to go home, it becomes a really disappointing bit of the walk for your dog!



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• Games

Play a game of **Boomerang** – throw a treat to one side of you, then as soon as your dog gets it, throw one to the other side. Repeat this several times, either standing still or while you are walking along. This is a great game to keep the pup focused on you and avoid distractions and you will quickly see eye contact improve as he looks at you to see where you're throwing the next one!



Another great game to help with recall is **Drop and Run** – drop a couple of treats on the ground, making sure the dog sees them. As she eats them, run away! Keep an eye on the dog and call her as soon as she turns to see where you've gone. As she catches up with you, drop a couple more and run again – repeat this several times and watch her recall get quicker and quicker!



Restrained recall – get someone else to hang on to your dog while you call him, waiting a second or two before releasing him to build that excitement into getting to you! Reward with a treat when he reaches you then, if you're both people who are going to be recalling him, reverse the game.



Check-In Clock – Imagine you're standing at the centre of a large clock face. Throw a treat out in front of you, towards 12 o'clock. As soon as your dog gets the treat and looks back at you, say 'Yes!' and reward by throwing one to 1 o'clock. Repeat this around the clock face

Free-following – with your dog on a long-line (or off lead if in a secure area or at home), start off walking with a handful of treats and reward a few steps of walking by your side. Then, abruptly change direction and walk off at a good fast pace. As soon as your dog catches up to you, feed a treat then change direction again – continue this, allowing him to wander off and sniff something interesting then rewarding every time they rejoin you.



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• Toys



If your dog finds playing with a particular toy more rewarding than treats, keep a special toy just for walks and make sure it's super-exciting when it comes out. Don't use a toy that is lying around all day, that won't be interesting enough – one that only appears on walks will have the wow factor and can be a real reward for toy-driven dogs.

If you struggle to get the toy back from him once he's in possession, teach a 'drop' at home then take two similar toys out with you.

Another useful item can be a squeaky toy (or just the squeaker from a previously-destroyed one!). Keep this for emergencies and use it to attract attention if your dog is fixated on a distraction or already taking off after it – make sure that as soon as you use it, you then employ all the previous training of the conditioned cue plus lots of treats. A squeak can have an amazing response, but don't over use it or, like many things, it will lose its effect.

• Recall to game or trick

Many dogs enjoy tricks like retrieve, middle, hand touch or spin, so you can use these as another reward for leaving that tempting distraction and hot- footing it back to you. Make sure the trick is hard-wired at home and heavily rewarded with treats, then try it when you're out on a walk so that your dog gets the idea that these things are happening when you're out. This can then be another alternative reinforcement for coming back, mixed in with treats and toys.



Middle also puts you in a great position to be able to get hold of your dog before they run off again, so it's a great trick to have at your disposal! Teach this at home, rewarding your dog for being in position and waiting there, then releasing in front of you so that you can see where he's off to. Additionally, this is a great place for dogs to be if they're worried about something in the environment – it's a safe place for them.

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• Engage/ Disengage

Lastly, it is worth teaching your dog to notice distractions such as other dogs and to disengage from them and return their focus to you. When you start training this, the process may seem a bit counter-intuitive, but stick with it as it makes sense in the end!

With your dog on lead and at a distance that she can cope with, stand somewhere such as a park or location that dog walkers use. Play **Boomerang** to get your dog paying attention to you, pausing every so often so that she can be aware of her surroundings. Have plenty of treats ready and when she looks at a distraction (passing walker/ runner/ dog, for example), mark (click if you use a clicker, or say 'yes!' or 'good!') and feed.

Do this several times, whenever she looks at a distraction. You may have to reach around and pop a treat in her mouth.

Then, stop.

Let her look at whatever is going past and don't feed. What you will find is that she will begin to look to you, as if asking 'where's my treat? You were just feeding me when I looked at dogs going past!'



At this point, as she looks at you, mark and feed. Do this as many times as you are able – let her look at a distraction, then mark and feed as she looks away and back to you. The aim of this is to encourage the dog to look at passing distractions and to be able to acknowledge they're there and return their attention to you. If we rely on trying to keep our dogs from noticing them, sooner or later we will miss one and be back to square one; this way, we teach the dog to be aware but to choose to ignore.

